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the DOLL'S HOUSE part I

GAIMAN • DRINGENBERG • JONES

THE DOLL'S HOUSE

THERE IS ONLY ONE THING TO SEE IN THE TWILIGHT REALM OF DESIRE.

IT IS CALLED *THE THRESHOLD.* THE FORTRESS OF DESIRE.

DESIRE HAS ALWAYS LIVED ON THE EDGE.

THE THRESHOLD IS LARGER THAN YOU CAN EASILY IMAGINE. IT IS A STATUE OF DESIRE, HIM-, HER- OR IT-SELF.

(DESIRE HAS NEVER BEEN SATISFIED WITH JUST ONE SEX. OR JUST ONE OF ANYTHING -- EXCEPTING ONLY PERHAPS THE THRESHOLD ITSELF.)

THE THRESHOLD IS A PORTRAIT OF DESIRE, COMPLETE IN ALL DETAILS, BUILT FROM THE FANCY OF DESIRE OUT OF BLOOD, AND FLESH, AND BONE, AND SKIN.

AND, LIKE EVERY TRUE CITADEL SINCE TIME BEGAN, THE THRESHOLD IS INHABITED.

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THERE IS ONLY ONE OCCUPANT, AT THIS TIME.

DESIRE OF THE ENDLESS.

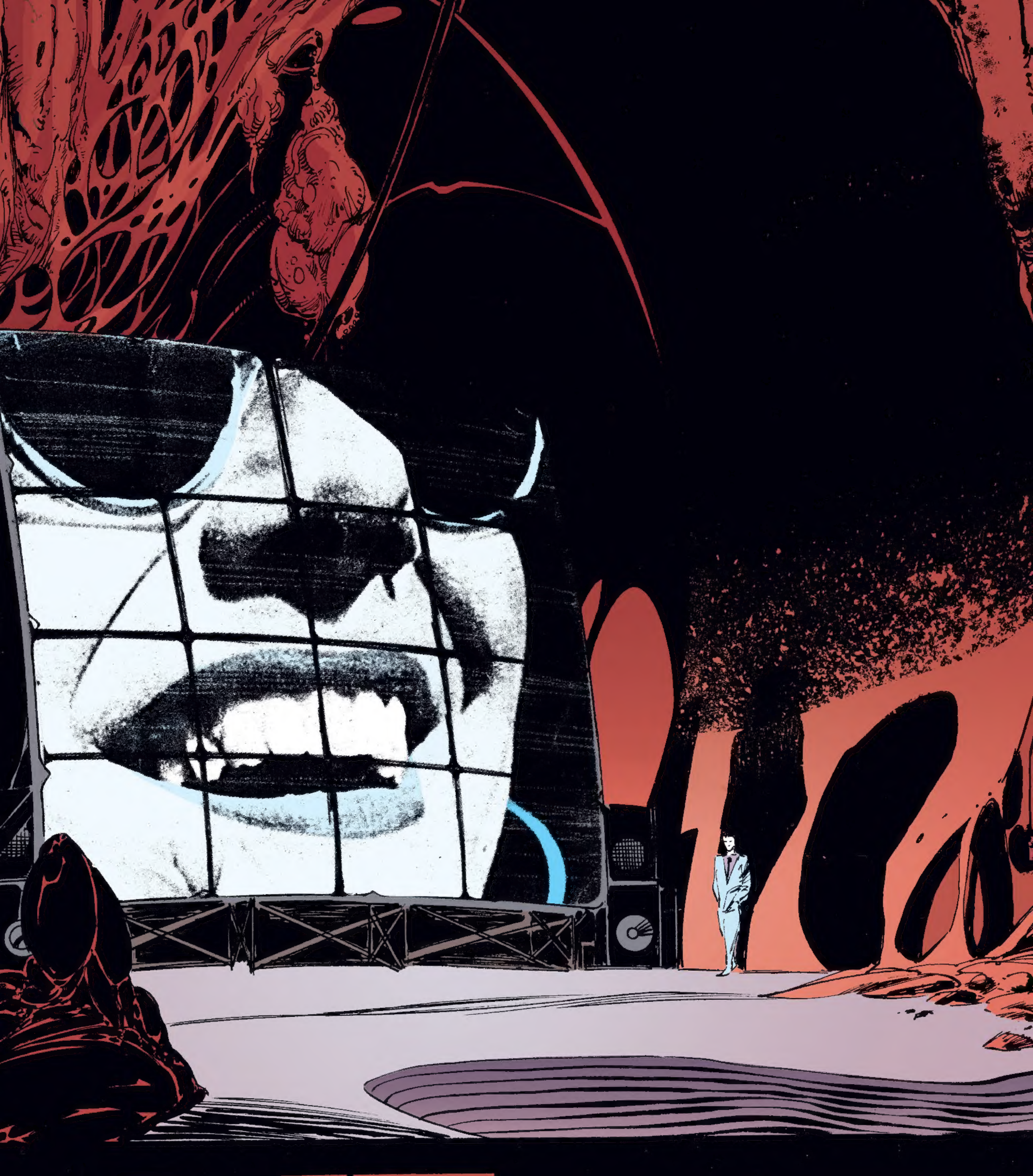
THE THRESHOLD IS FAR TOO LARGE FOR JUST ONE PERSON.

IT CONTAINS TWO EARDRUMS LARGER THAN A DOZEN MARBLE BALLROOMS.

AND EMPTY, ECHOING VEINS, LIKE TUNNELS. YOU WILL WALK THEM UNTIL YOU GROW OLD AND DIE WITHOUT ONCE RETRACING YOUR STEPS.

GIVEN DESIRE'S TEMPERAMENT, HOWEVER, THERE WAS ONLY ONE PLACE IN THE CATHEDRAL OF ITS BODY TO MAKE ITS HOME.

DESIRE LIVES IN THE HEART.



BIG BROTHER...

...I'M WATCHING YOU.

ATTEND, SWEET SIBLING. I STAND IN MY GALLERY AND I HOLD YOUR SIGIL.

WILL YOU TALK TO ME?

I AM ALWAYS READY TO *LISTEN* TO YOU, DESIRE.

TALK.

I HAVE NEWS.

REAL NEWS? THE PRODIGAL HAS RETURNED?

WHAT? OH, *HIM*. NO, HE'S STILL MISSING.

NO, I SPEAK OF *DREAM*.

YOU SEEK TO SNARE HIM IN YOUR MACHINATIONS AGAIN?

DESIRE, THE ELDER THREE DON'T PLAY OUR LITTLE GAMES.

IT WON'T WORK. IT *CAN'T* WORK. IT DIDN'T WORK LAST TIME.

NO. IT DIDN'T. NADA WAS A MISTAKE.

BUT THINGS HAVE *CHANGED*, MY LOVE, MY TWIN. THERE IS A DREAM VORTEX, THE FIRST FOR A LONG TIME.

AND IT IS A *WOMAN*.

AAH.

SO WE WAIT.

ARE WE NOT *ENDLESS*, QUEEN OF DESPAIR?

YES. WE WAIT.

I SEE.

JUST PERHAPS... HMM.

TELL ME NO MORE.

I MUST *THINK* ABOUT THIS.

GOODBYE.

FARE WELL, MY TWIN.

IS THERE SOMETHING YOU CRAVE?

SOMETHING SEXUAL? SOMETHING PRECIOUS? SOMEONE SPECIAL? *ANYTHING*?

THEN YOU HAVE FELT IT. IT'S THERE -- IN THE LONGING, IN THE LUST: THE BREATH OF DESIRE, THE CARESS OF THE THRESHOLD.

MOM WOKE ME UP WHEN WE WERE COMING IN FOR A LANDING. MY LEGS WERE CRAMPED AND I FELT GENERALLY SHITTY.

WAKE UP, ROSE. HONEY. WE'RE ALMOST *THERE*. FASTEN YOUR SEAT BELT.

ROSE? WAKE UP.

MMM. MOM...?

I HAD SUCH A *WEIRD* DREAM. THERE WAS THIS HUGE, FAT BRITISH GUY, AND THESE WOMEN, AND WE WERE LIVING IN THIS HOUSE...

YOU WERE IN THE DREAM...

AND I FOUND JED AGAIN...

MOM WASN'T INTERESTED IN DREAMS, BACK THEN.

ROSE, *JUST* FASTEN YOUR SEATBELT.

THIS AIRPORT, *GATWICK*, IS IT NEAR LONDON?

HOW SHOULD *I* KNOW?

GACK! TASTES LIKE SOMETHING DIED IN MY MOUTH A COUPLA HOURS BACK...

YEAH? I GOT SOME BREATH FRESHENER SOMEWHERE IN MY BAG.

IT'S SO *GREEN!* LOOK AT THOSE FIELDS! OUR FIRST TIME IN ENGLAND...

IT'S *NOT* YOUR FIRST TIME, MOM. YOU WERE BORN HERE.

THAT WAS A *LONG* TIME AGO, HON. I WAS JUST A TINY KID WHEN MOM AND POP WENT TO THE STATES.

I DON'T *REMEMBER*.

IT TOOK ABOUT AN HOUR FOR US TO GET OUR BAGS AND CLEAR CUSTOMS.

MOM? THAT MUST BE THE GUY WHO'S MEETING US!

WALKER

GAHD. A CIGARETTE. FI-NALLY.

OVER THERE.

HI! ARE YOU THE ATTORNEY WE'RE SUPPOSED TO MEET? MR. HOLDAWELL?

IT'S HOLDAWAY, MADAM. AND WE CALL OURSELVES "SOLICITORS" ON THIS SIDE OF THE ATLANTIC. MAY I TAKE IT THAT YOU ARE MRS. WALKER?

WHO *ELSE* AM I GOING TO BE? I'M MIRANDA WALKER, AND THIS IS MY DAUGHTER, ROSE.

HI.

HE WAS LIKE *SOMETHING FROM MASTERPIECE THEATER*. I COULD TELL MOM WAS IMPRESSED. I WASN'T.

LISTEN, NOW THAT WE'RE *HERE*, CAN YOU *FINALLY* TELL ME WHAT THIS IS ALL ABOUT?

IT'S NOT THAT WE'RE NOT *GRATEFUL*-- FREE HOLIDAYS IN ENGLAND DON'T GROW ON *TREES*...

LET ME HELP YOU WITH YOUR LUGGAGE, MRS. WALKER.

MY CLIENT WILL EXPLAIN *EVERYTHING*, VERY SOON.

AIRPORT

NOW, IF YOU'LL BOTH COME THIS WAY. THE CAR'S IN THE CAR-PARK, THROUGH HERE...

FIVE MINUTES OUTSIDE THE AIRPORT AND WE WERE DRIVING THROUGH THE BRITISH COUNTRYSIDE. I WAS UNDERWHELMED, BUT MOM SEEMED TO LIKE IT.

WOW. IT'S ALL SO *GREEN*. MUST BE ALL THE *RAIN*, HUH?

AS YOU SAY.

SO WHEN DO WE MEET OUR MYSTERIOUS BENEFACTOR THEN, MR. HOLDAWAY?

MY CLIENT LIVES ABOUT TWENTY MINUTES FROM HERE.

HE MUST BE VERY *RICH*. TO FLY US ALL THE WAY OVER HERE FOR TWO WEEKS.

YES. YES, SHE IS.

SHE? OH...

I WAS *SO* EXCITED WHEN I GOT YOUR LETTER! I PHONED ROSE, AND I SAID, *ROSE*, WE'RE GOING TO *ENGLAND!*

SHE THOUGHT IT WAS SOME KIND OF PRACTICAL *JOKE* AT FIRST--ISN'T THAT RIGHT, ROSE.

ROSE?

ROSE! THAT GIRL! CAN YOU BELIEVE IT, MISTER HOLDAWAY? SHE'S FALLEN ASLEEP *AGAIN*...

ABEL-- IF I *WANTED* SILLY TITTLETATTLE AND HEDGE GOSSIP ABOUT "*SWIRLING THINGS*," I WOULD HAVE ASKED YOU FOR IT.

ALL I WANT IS A LIST OF THE ENTITIES THAT *RESIDE* HERE.

WHUWELL, HMM, IF YOU PUH-PUT IT LIKE *THAT*, THERE'S *ME*... AND, UHH, THERE'S THE HOUSE *ITSELF*, MM, OF COURSE. AND THE B-BOTTLE IMP.

THANK YOU, ABEL. EVERYTHING SEEMS TO BE IN ORDER.

AND, UH, *DON'T* GO SPREADING FOOLISH RUMORS, EH?

YES, THANK YOU AS WELL, GOLDIE.

merk.

THAT'S BETTER. SO... YOU, ABEL, --CHECK; THE *HOUSE* --CHECK; *BOTTLE IMP*'S *SECRETS*--CHECK; *SOMETHING NASTY* IN THE *BASEMENT*--CHECK; AND A BABY GARGOYLE NAMED GOLDIE. HMM--A NEW ADDITION, EH?

aarkle.

AH, OH MY, UH, OH *DEAR*, I, AAH, *SEEM* INADVERTENTLY TO HAVE OMITTED MY FUH*FRIEND*...

IT'S CALLED GOLDIE.

meep?

AND THERE'S PUH-PROBABLY *SOMETHING* UN*SPEAKABLY* NASTY IN THE SUB-BUHBASEMENT, UH, MMM, BUHBUT I, AHH, DON'T *EVER* GO DOWN THERE...

ELEVEN THOUSAND AND TWO, ELEVEN THOUSAND AND THREE...

CLICK

ELEVEN THOUSAND AND SEVENTEEN, ELEVEN THOUSAND AND EIGHTEEN...

CLACK

ELEVEN THOUSAND AND THIRTY-FOUR, ELEVEN THOUSAND AND THIRTY-FIVE...

ELEVEN THOUSAND AND FORTY-TWO, ELEVEN THOUSAND AND FORTY-THREE, ELEVEN THOUSAND AND FORTY-FOUR...

ELEVEN THOUSAND AND SIXTY-ONE, ELEVEN THOUSAND AND SIXTY-TWO.

AS I THOUGHT.

ONLY FOUR BIG ONES UNACCOUNTED FOR.

I HAVE COMPLETED THE CENSUS, LORD.

You have tallied them all, I presume?

Hello, Lucien.

What tidings do you bring me?

SOME GOOD, SOME BAD, MY LORD.

YES, SIRE. THERE ARE ELEVEN THOUSAND AND SIXTY-TWO ACCOUNTED FOR.

SOME MINOR NIGHTKIND ARE MISSING, A FEW OF THE LESSER DREAMS AND CREATURES.

THERE ARE ALSO A HANDFUL OF NEW ENTITIES.

That is to be expected.

But you said you had bad news?

FOUR OF THE *MAJOR ARCANA* ARE *GONE*, SIRE. THEY ARE NOT TO BE FOUND IN THE DREAMING.

Name them.

"BRUTE AND GLOB, OF YOUR PALACE STAFF, SIRE. THEY VANISHED A FEW DECADES AGO--AS I SUPPOSED, TO THE FRINGES OF THE DREAMING. BUT THEY AREN'T ANYWHERE TO BE FOUND...

"I NEVER TRUSTED THEM, MY LORD."

"It was not in their natures to be trustworthy, Lucien. Who else is missing?"

"WELL...THE CORINTHIAN."

"I see. That could well be bad news. The Corinthian is not the... most social...of nightmares."

"And the fourth?"

"FIDDLER'S GREEN. HE'S NOT IN THE DREAMWORLD. NOWHERE. I CHECKED TWICE."

"Fiddler's Green is missing? That is passing strange, Lucien. He is, after all, vavasour of his own dominion. And always so... reliable."

"I KNOW, LORD."

These are all disturbing absences, Lucien. I do not like this: four puissant creatures escaped from the Dreaming... I blame myself. Had I been here, fulfilling my function...

IT WAS NOT YOUR FAULT, MY LORD.

No? Then WHOSE?

THERE IS *MORE* NEWS, MY LORD.

PURE *GOSSIP* AMONGST THE NIGHTKIND, OF COURSE, BUT PERHAPS, UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT COULD BE SIGNIFICANT...

ON MY TRAVELS, AS I TOOK THE CENSUS, I REPEATEDLY HEARD THE SAME MURMURS FROM THE DREAM-FOLK.

THERE ARE RUMORS OF A *VORTEX*, MY LORD. PERHAPS YOU MIGHT WISH TO INVESTIGATE...?

I have already done so.

The rumors are quite true, Lucien. There is indeed a vortex, a true annulet.

The first of this era.

THAT WAS WHEN I REALIZED THAT I WAS DREAMING...

WHY, YOU ARE *RIGHT*, LORD! QUINTESSENTIAL VORTEX MATERIAL... AND SHE'S SO *YOUNG*...

"*ROSE!* WAKE *UP*, HONEY! WE'VE *ARRIVED!*"

THEN YOU MUST *HUNT* FOR IT, SIRE! IT MUST BE *CONTROLLED!*

I need do neither, Lucien. There is no need to alarm yourself so...

The vortex is a **SHE**, not an IT.

IF you look closely you will see her observing us, now, from the corner of the throne room.

Perhaps one of our problems may prove a solution to the other.

IT WAS ME. THEY WERE LOOKING AT *ME!*

MPH. GOTTA BE THIS TRAVELING. 'NOTHER WEIRD DREAM. OOH.

LIKE A FAIRY TALE. WEIRD PEOPLE. KINGS 'N' GOBLINS...

LOOKING AT ME...

COME ON, HON. YOU'RE STILL HALF ASLEEP. WE'RE *HERE*.

SAY! YOUR CLIENT-- DOES SHE OWN ALL OF THIS?

NO, MRS. WALKER. THIS IS A PRIVATE NURSING HOME FOR THE ELDERLY. MY CLIENT IS MERELY A RESIDENT.

SHALL WE GO IN?

...WHAT'S AN "ANNULET"?

A *WHAT*?

IT'S A KIND OF RING, I BELIEVE. OLD WORD. AN UNUSUAL THING TO WANT TO KNOW.

WHERE DID YOU RUN ACROSS A WORD LIKE THAT, GIRLIE?

I WAS *RIGHT*. HOLDAWAY WAS A *TOTAL* BOZO.

I DON'T KNOW... I THINK THAT IT WAS SOMETHING IN MY DREAM.

I'M TWENTY-ONE, AND I *WOULDN'T* HAVE LIKED IT WHEN I WAS *TEN*.

AND--*PLEASE* DON'T CALL ME "GIRLIE".

I BEG YOUR PARDON, MISS WALKER.

KNOK KNOK

MISS KINKAID? YOUR GUESTS ARE HERE.

PLEASE COME IN! IT ISN'T LOCKED.

I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WAS EXPECTING. NOT HER. SHE LOOKED LOST, AND FRAGILE, LIKE A LITTLE CHINA DOLL.

AND WEIRDLY FAMILIAR, AND I DIDN'T KNOW WHY.

HELLO. YOU'RE MIRANDA WALKER. AND YOU MUST BE ROSE. COME OVER HERE, DARLING. BOTH OF YOU. LET ME LOOK AT YOU.

I'M *UNITY.* UNITY KINKAID.

YES. OH *YES.*

PLEASE, BOTH OF YOU, SIT NEXT TO ME.

THIS...THIS IS MY ROOM. I THOUGHT BRIEFLY ABOUT MOVING OUT, BUT THE BEDFORD SQUARE HOUSE WAS *SOLD* A LONG TIME AGO, AND I'VE LIVED HERE *SO LONG.*

OVER *THIRTY YEARS,* THEY *TELL* ME.

THAT'S ALL I HAVE LEFT OF THE OLD HOUSE. HOLDAWAYS HELD ONTO IT WHEN THE FURNITURE WAS SOLD, ALONG WITH A FEW PERSONAL POSSESSIONS.

I'M *SORRY* ABOUT ALL THIS RIGMAROLE. IT WAS MY OWN FAULT.

I WANTED TO *SEE* YOU BOTH, YOU SEE, AND I THOUGHT PERHAPS IF IT WERE ALL EXPLAINED TO YOU *FIRST* YOU...YOU MIGHT NOT HAVE BEEN *WILLING* TO *COME.*

AND I COULDN'T HAVE *BORNE* THAT.

JACK, PLEASE LEAVE US.

CERTAINLY, MISS KINKAID. I'LL BE WAITING DOWNSTAIRS, IN THE SITTING ROOM.

I DON'T REMEMBER *HIM*. BUT I KNEW HIS FATHER--OR PERHAPS IT WAS HIS GRANDFATHER. HOLDAWAYS HAVE BEEN THE FAMILY SOLICITORS SINCE THE '45 REBELLION...

LISTEN, MISS, UH, KINKAID, I DON'T WANT TO BE *RUDE* OR *UNGRATEFUL* OR ANYTHING, BUT--WHAT IS THIS *ABOUT*?

LOOK IN THE MIRROR.

DON'T YOU SEE IT, DEAR? I'M YOUR *MOTHER*, MIRANDA. I'M YOUR GRAND-MOTHER, ROSE.

DON'T YOU *SEE*?

YOU--YOU'RE *MAD*, MY MOTHER, SHE'S *DEAD*, I *KNEW* MY MOTHER, I-UH, THIS IS CUH*CRAZY*, I, NO...

HSSH... ROSE, DARLING, CAN YOU WAIT OUTSIDE? *PLEASE*? I OUGHT TO TALK TO YOUR MOTHER ALONE.

MIRANDA?

JUST SIT THERE, DEAR. *PLEASE* DON'T CRY. I HAVE TO SHOW YOU SOME DOCUMENTS...

IT WAS *TRUE*. I KNEW IT WAS TRUE, EVEN IF MOM DIDN'T SEE IT.

CLAK

BUT THIS KIND OF THING DOESN'T *HAPPEN* TO YOU, DOES IT? IT HAPPENS TO OTHER PEOPLE.

SO MUCH WAS HAPPENING SO FAST.

I WISHED I COULD REMEMBER MY DREAM. THERE WAS A MAN IN BLACK... *NO*, NOT BLACK. HE LOOKED LIKE HE WAS DRESSED IN *THE NIGHT...*

PSST!

UHH... HELLO?

HELLO, ROSE WALKER.

WHO'S THERE? DO I *KNOW* YOU?

YOU'RE AT A CROSSROADS, ROSE.

HEE! YOU'VE LEARNED SO *MUCH* TODAY, CHILD!

YOUR WHOLE FAMILY, MY BUTTERFLY, TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME... EXCEPT FOR YOUR BROTHER, OF COURSE.

JED? YOU KNOW ABOUT *JED?* WHO *ARE* YOU?

NAMES, NAMES, NAMES...EACH NAME IS BUT A SINGLE ASPECT OF THE WHOLE.

BE SATISFIED WITH THE TRINITY YOU HAVE. F'R EXAMPLE, YOU WOULDN'T WANT TO MEET US AS THE KINDLY ONES. WE CAN ONLY CAUTION YOU, SISTER. WE CAN'T PROTECT YOU.

PROTECT ME? FROM *WHAT?*

FROM LIFE, MY POSY, MY POPPET. AND FROM MORE THAN LIFE.

FROM THE THINGS THAT HOVER BEYOND LIFE, THRASHING THEIR SELFS AGAINST IT, TRYING TO GET IN...

DAUGHTER, BEWARE DREAMS AND HOUSES.

"WHO *ARE* YOU? YOUR VOICE KEEPS CHANGING. HOW MANY OF YOU *ARE* THERE?"

HEE! I AM *ONE*, AND *THREE*, AND *MANY*... BUT THAT WAS THE WRONG *QUESTION*, CHILD!

HEE! NOW YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO FIND IT *ALL* OUT ON YOUR OWN.

'FRAID WE CAN'T DO ANY MORE AT THIS TIME. A BITCH, HUH?

GOOD LUCK, MY SPARROW. MY DAUGHTER...

...SISTER...

...CHILD...

I DON'T GET *ANY* OF THIS. WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT? WHAT *IS* THIS ROOM? I-- I'M TURNING ON THE *LIGHT*.

KLIK

HUH?

HAD YOU ASKED THE *RIGHT* QUESTION I COULD HAVE WARNED YOU AGAINST THE CORINTHIAN, TOLD YOU OF JED, AND OF MORPHEUS...

PLEASE WASH YOUR HANDS!

A BROOM CLOSET...?

ROSE?

AAA

ARE YOU OKAY, HON? SORRY I STARTLED YOU.

COME *HERE*, BABY. SEEMS YOUR GRANDMOTHER AND I HAVE A LOT TO TELL YOU.

YES, IT'S ALL TRUE, ROSEBUD. SHE'S *REALLY* MY MOTHER.

COME HERE. WE'LL TELL YOU ABOUT IT.

NOTHING.

NOTHING'S THE MATTER.

I WAS... *ILL* FOR A *VERY* LONG TIME, DEAR. I ONLY CAME TO MY SENSES LAST YEAR.

WHILST I WAS ILL I... I *HAD* A *BABY.*

THAT WAS YOUR MOTHER, ROSE. THAT WAS MIRANDA.

MY FAMILY ARRANGED FOR THE BABY TO BE ADOPTED.

WHEN I RECOVERED, I CALLED IN MR. HOLDAWAY. I TOLD HIM I WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE BABY. AT FIRST HE LIED TO ME. EVENTUALLY HE ADMITTED THE TRUTH. THERE *HAD* BEEN A BABY...

...I AM A VERY RICH WOMAN. WE HIRED PRIVATE DETECTIVES TO FIND THE CHILD. THE TRAIL WAS VERY COLD, BUT THERE HAD BEEN RECORDS.

I HAD HOLDAWAY SEND YOU TWO THE LETTERS, AND THE AIRFARE... AND... WELL...

EVENTUALLY THEY FOUND MIRANDA. AND YOU, ROSE.

...HERE YOU ARE.

THE WHOLE FAMILY. TOGETHER FOR THE FIRST TIME.

NOT JED, THOUGH. I *WONDERED*-- HAD MOM *TOLD* HER ABOUT JED?

I'M ALMOST NINETY, ROSE. BUT I'VE ONLY REALLY *LIVED* FOR ABOUT SEVENTEEN YEARS. IN A FUNNY WAY, I'M YOUNGER THAN *YOU*...

I... I SHOULD *GIVE* YOU SOMETHING, SHOULDN'T I? HERE. SOMETHING FOR YOU. A *RING*.

THE ANNULET...?

WHAT?

IT'S ALL COMING TRUE, ISN'T IT? MY DREAMS...

WHAT ARE YOU *TALKING* ABOUT, ROSEBUD?

WHAT'S *HAPPENING* TO ME, MOM? THE WOMAN IN THE HALL CLOSET. SHE KNEW ABOUT *JED*. SHE SAID I SHOULD BEWARE OF THE CORINTHIAN...

WHAT'S "*THE CORINTHIAN*"?

"THE LOVE INN MOTEL", AMARILLO, TEXAS. THE CORINTHIAN:

YOU WANT ANY MORE WINE, YOU JUST RING ROOM SERVICE, YOU HEAR?

I WILL. YOU'VE BEEN VERY HELPFUL-- THANK YOU...

THAT'S GOOD. YOU TOOK MY ADVICE.

DIDN'T GO ANYWHERE...

LISTEN, MISTER. I SAID I DIDN'T MIND THE KINKY STUFF, BUT, LISTEN, YOU UNTIE ME, MAN, I'LL DO WHATEVER YOU WANT, MAN, JUST, PLEASE...

DAVY, I SAID WE WERE ONLY GOING TO PLAY, DIDN'T I?

YEAH. JUST PLAY. THASS RIGHT.

OH NO. NO. OH NO.

NOW, DAVY...

IT'S PLAYTIME.

NEXT: "MOVING IN"

SON OF ULTRON